Elton John retires as Ozzie quits Sabbath

ELTON JOHN announced on Thursday night that he was retiring from live appearances.

Business pressures, including John's involvement with Watford Football Club, led to the singer's decision, which he announced to a sell-out crowd at London's Wembley Empire Pool last Thursday.

While sceptics regard his action as merely paving the way for a number of special "comeback" appearances, his decision only affects live shows. His recording career remains unaffected, and he has only just returned from America where he has been recording new songs, his first since "Blue Moves" in 1976, with soul producer Thom Bell.

He has recorded a new single that was due in the shops to coincide with the Wembley show, but the release date has now been put back, and the single is still without a title.

A book about Elton John — Elton: It's A Little Bit Funny— was recently published in Britain. The book is a photographic account of his last two US tours, with photographs by David Nutter and text by Bernie Taupin.

Elton was midway through his marathon two-and-a-half hour show for charity when he told the audience of his decision which came as a severe shock even to his manager John Reid and his record company Rocket.

"I haven't been touring for some time," he told them, "and it's been a painful decision whether to come back or not. I've really enjoyed tonight . . . thank you very much (applause). But I've decided this will be my last show, right? There's a lot more to me than being on the road."

Gasps of astonishment went round the hall and then suddenly everyone was one their feet yelling "No," almost in the form of a chant, which only subsided as Elton went into a particularly poignant version of "Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me".

There were more shocks in store though, as Elton later introduced Kiki Dee to sing "Don't Go Breaking My Heart" with him, and then brought on Stevie Wonder to join him on piano as a blistering finale to the show.

Elton later declined to add to his statement from the stage, but his involvement with Watford Football Club (he's chairman) has obviously been a prime factor. He's attended most of Watford's matches this season, but has evidently still found a conflict between his work with the club and his music career as well as his other business interests.

A spokesman for Rocket told MM this week: "We knew nothing about it — we were as surprised as anyone else. Even John Reid didn't know. Obviously we're disappointed, but it's his personal decision and he's every right to make it."

Rocket, who've been deluged with calls from press and public since the show, said reasons for his retirement were "pressure of business".

Elton's musical career started in the late Sixties when he played keyboards with Long John Baldry's backing band, Bluesology, but his real break came when he teamed up with Bernie Taupin as a songwriter. They made demo tapes secretly at Dick James Studios, James being so impressed by the tapes that he eventually offered Elton a recording contract.

In the early Seventies his reputation grew rapidly, enhanced by his natural ability as a supreme showman. His glitter costumes and enormous heels were at the centre of the glitter fashion cult.

Last year, after intensive touring schedules he announced he would be cutting down on live work in order to stay at home more, and his only work in Britain of late was the residency he played at London's Rainbow Theatre, accompanied only by Ray Cooper.

Ozzie Osbourne, singer with Black Sabbath since the band formed nine years ago in Birmingham, has quit. His decision came after a meeting with the band last week, and he said his departure is entirely amicable.

He has left the band to follow some form of solo career, but exactly what is planned has not yet been announced.

Black Sabbath are now looking for a replacement singer, and a vocalist with a fairly well-known band flew in from America this week for an audition.

The band was planning an album when Osbourne decided to quit, and as soon as a singer has been found rehearsals will go ahead. The record will be recorded in Toronto before Christmas, and is due for release in the Spring to coincide with a British tour.

ELTON JOHN: retiring from live work/OZZIE OSBOU